On Thursday, February 9, a fellow student and I were privileged to attend a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education presentation at a local high school. We were invited to the presentation as part of the STEM video game challenge. The presentation consisted of local game studios and academic groups from the surrounding area.

The visit raised my hopes for the future of technology centric careers in the future. There were many young students who were showing genuine interest in gaming and related fields. Since 1970 the US has gone from having approximately fifty percent of the worlds since and engineering doctorates to approximately only fifteen percent in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education). It is staggering numbers like these that exemplify the need for programs like STEM.

One of the biggest attractions at the presentation was the announcements concerning the STEM 2012 video game challenge (http://stemchallenge.org). The challenge is designed to promote technology careers and to “unlock the promise of breakthrough technologies to transform teaching and learning.” This is the second year for the STEM video game challenge. The first challenge started in September of 2010 and ended on March of 2011. There are multiple categories in the challenge including middle school, high school, and collegiate levels. Last years winners received high media coverage and some of the games were even produced commercially. Prizes vary by category, but usually include a game ready laptop and/or cash money for the winners and their sponsors. If you are interested in creating your own game, but do not know where to start, I suggest checking out the resource page on the STEM video game challenge site (http://stemchallenge.org/resources/Default.aspx). There you can find game engines and editors for every skill level. Note that entries for the 2012 challenge close on March 12, 2012.

I feel that video games are a great way to get students involved in the sciences simply because it is something familiar to them. Most kids play video games. It is a fact that you just can't avoid. I also think that it is a safe assumption to state that at some point each kid has also had the though of creating a video game. By giving students the opportunity and training needed to create a game while keeping the content of the game constrained in the realm of science is a great way to get students involved in science. In order to make a game on a particular topic you need to understand said topic.

For those who are already in the game base careers (collegiate level), the competition means something entirely different. For the collegiate level competition the objective of the challenge is...
not to simply make a game as in the middle and high school levels. In the collegiate level the goal is to create an educational game aimed at grades K-8. This competition does not necessarily increase the competitor's interest in science and technology related careers, but does allow for the opportunity of increasing other's interest. Educational games created in this part of the competition could be played in future classrooms.